

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MUSCAT 174

NOFORN

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS, MU

SUBJECT: DHOFAR WAR: COMMENTS OF DHOFAR BRIGADE COMMANDER

SUMMARY: THIS WINTER'S SAF AND IRANIAN MILITARY INITIATIVES, THOUGH THEY ENCOUNTERED INTENSE REBEL RESISTANCE AND THEREFORE PROVED LESS DECISIVE THAN HAD BEEN HOPED, FURTHER COMPRESSED THE AREA OF ENEMY DOMINATION IN WESTERN DHOFAR. WAR IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN JABAL CONTINUED QUIET WITH REMAINING HARD CORE GUERRILLAS UNDER COVER. WITH WAR ITSELF INCREASINGLY CONFINED TO FAR WESTERN SECTOR OF DHOFAR, THERE IS SCOPE FOR INCREASING THE PACE OF CIVIL ACTION PROGRAMS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN JABAL. END SUMMARY.

1. SECONDED BRITISH COMMANDER OF DHOFAR BRIGADE, BRIG. JOHN AKEHURST, PORTRAYED PROGRESS IN WAR AGAIJQAHVHOFAR REVOLUTIONARIES AS VERY SATISFACTORY DURING FEB. 4 DISCUSSION WITH AMBASSADOR AT AKEHURST'S SALALAH HEADQUARTERS. WAS PARTICULARLY WARM IN PRAISE OF OUTGOING SAF COMMANDER GEN. CREASEY, SAYING HE ARRIVED IN 1972 WITH THINGS GOING BADLY INDEED, AND LEFT ON
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END-OF-TOUR FEB. 2 WITH WAR "PRACTICALLY WON."

2. AKEHURST CONTENDED MUCH SUCCESS HAS COME FROM DEC-JAN SAF AND IRANIAN TASK FORCE CAMPAIGNS IN WESTERN JABAL, THOUGH ADMITTEDLY CASUALTIES HAVE BEEN HIGHER THAN EXPECTED. IRANIAN CAPTURE OF RAKHYUT AND COMMENCEMENT OF NEW DAMAVAND STATIC DEFENSE LINE, TOGETHER WITH COMPLEMENTARY SAF ACTIONS, HAS BROUGHT UNDER OMANI CONTROL HALF THE WESTERN JABAL SECTOR. AKEHURST MAINTAINED THAT DESPITE WHAT SOME SKEPTICS HAVE BEEN SAYING, PHYSICAL TERRAIN THROUGH WHICH DAMAVAND LINE IS BEING SET UP IS EASIER TERRAIN THAN THAT TO THE EAST TRANSITTED BY SUCCESSFUL HORNBEAM LINE.

3. ASKED WHAT NEAR FUTURE ACTIONS HE ENVISAGES TO FOLLOW UP RECENT OPERATIONS NADER AND DARAB IN SHERISHITTI AND RAKHYUT SECTORS, BRIG. AKEHURST SAID HE WOULD BE RECOMMENDING TO NEW SAF COMMANDER PERKINS, DUE IN DHOFAR THE FOLLOWING DAY, A PATTERN OF SPORADIC "IN AND OUT" THRUSTS IN VARIOUS LOCATIONS BETWEEN HORNBEAM AND DAMAVAND LINES. SAID HE DOES NOT EXPECT THERE WILL BE RENEWED MAJOR OFFENSIVE INTO SHERISHITTI CAVE AND WADI REGION WEST OF DAMAVAND LINE "FOR NOW," AS WOULD ENTAIL UNACCEPTABLY HIGH LOSSES.

4. AS TO OTHER SECTORS, AKEHURST SAID JABAL EAST OF SALALAH-MIDWAY ROAD VERY QUIET WITH REMAINING 100 OR SO HARD CORE REBELS REMAINING PRETTY MUCH IN HIDING IN RECENT MONTHS SAVE FOR TWO FORAYS TO AMBUSH VEHICLES ON TAQA-MARBAT ROAD, WHICH CAUSED NO KIA. (FACT THAT AMBASSADOR ACCOMPANIED BY MRS. WOLLE HAD COMPLETED EARLIER SAME DAY AN UNEVENTFUL 6-HOUR HELICOPTER TOUR TO RAVENS ROOST, WHITE CITY, TAWI ATAIR AND MARBAT UNDERSCORES NEAR-PEACEFUL STATE OF AFFAIRS IN EASTERN JABAL, WHERE FOCUS OF ACTIVITY CLEARLY IS ON REMMING THROUGH MORE ROADS AND INTENSIFYING REHAB EFFORTS RATHER THAN MILITARY DEFENSES.) REGARDING SIMBA REDOUBT AREA NEAR PDRY BORDER, AKEHURST SAID IT STILL TAKES 2-300 INCOMING SHELLS MONTHLY BUT CASUALTIES HAVE BEEN NIL MOST OF WINTER. HE SAID SIMBA NOW ENCOMPASSES AREA ABOUT 7 BY 10 KILOMETERS IN DIMENSION; THOUGH TERRAIN IS QUITE OPEN, ALL SAF POSITIONS THERE ARE MUTUALLY SUPPORTING AND WOULD PROVIDE WITHERING DEFENSIVE FIRE IN EVENT OF ENEMY FRONTAL ASSAULT, WHICH HAS NEVER BEEN ATTEMPTED AND IS NOT LIKELY TO BE.

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5. AKEHURST SPOKE OF FACILITIES OFFERED BY SAF FOR RECENT SPATE OF WESTERN PRESS CORRESPONDENTS, INDICATING HE WOULD CONTINUE DO HIS BEST, INCLUDING HELICOPTER FACILITIES WHEN OPERATIONAL NEEDS PERMITTED. HE RECALLED THAT SOME OF HOAGLAND'S (WASHINGTON POST) COPY IN DECEMBER UPSET THE SHAH AND THIS MEANT WESTERN JOURNALISTS UNLIKELY HAVE FURTHER ACCESS TO IRANIAN HEADQUARTERS OR UNITS IN DHOFAR FOR TIME

BEING. AMBASSADOR TOLD AKEHURST THAT RECENT BATCH (RENDELL OF LONDON TIMES, JENSEN OF AP AND BONAR OF MIDDLE EAST SKETCH) LQAD TOLD EMBASSY AFTER THEIR DHOFAR VISITS THEY WERE SATISFIED WITH FACILITIES OFFERED, WHICH INCLUDED TWO-HOUR STOP AT MASIRAH. (PACE OF NY TIMES EXPRESSED SAME SATISFACTION TO US AFTER FEB. 5-7 VISIT TO DHOFAR AND MASIRAH.)

6. COMMENT. THOUGH CASUALTIES IN GOVERNMENT'S WESTERN SECTOR OFFENSIVES DURING DEC-JAN WERE HEAVY, SOMETHING IN ORDER OF 75 KIA AND 90 WIA INCLUDING BOTH SAF AND IRANIAN AS COMPAIRED WITH PERHAPS HALF THOSE NUMBERS ON ENEMY SIDE, THE AREA BEING ACTIVELY CONTESTED HAS BEEN STEADILY REDUCED THROUGH SAF/IRANIAN PRESSURES. VIEW OF MOST WESTERN CORRESPONDENTS AS EXPRESSED TO EMBASSY RECENTLY IS THAT FIGHTING PHASE OF THIS GUERRILLA WAR IS RAPIDLY ENDING. FOCUS MORE AND MORE WILL BE ON GETTING STEAM BEHIND THE JABAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM WHICH HAS BARELY BEGUN AND WHICH WILL BE SLOAZGOING UNLESS AND UNTIL MORE ROADS OR YEAR-ROUND VEHICULAR TRACKS CAN BE PUSHED TO CONCLUSION AND SUFFICIENT QUALIFIED SUPERVISORS ASSIGNED TO CIVIL ACTION TASKS. AMBASSADOR'S OBSERVATIONS IN CENTRAL AND WESTERN JABAL REGIONS FEB. 2-5 SUPPORT THESE CONCLUSIONS. WOLLE

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